

## Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07 LAB-04

NSAE-00 SIL-01 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 L-03 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 TRSE-00 MMO-01 PC-01 IGA-02

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R 021130Z DEC 76

FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8073

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BUENOS AIRES 7825

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB, ECON, AR

SUBJECT: NEW YORK STOPPAGES IN AUTO PLANTS FOLLOW GOVERNMENT'S  
PUBLICATION OF WAGE RATES

REF: (A) BUENOS AIRES 7701, (B) BUENOS AIRES 7555; (C) BUENOS  
AIRES 6133

1. SUMMARY. ALTHOUGH RENEWED WORK STOPPAGES IN THE AUTO INDUSTRY  
ARE BEING DESCRIBED AS A REACTION TO THE GOVERNMENT'S PUBLICATION  
OF WAGE RATES BELOW THOSE CURRENTLY PREVAILING IN THE INDUSTRY,  
THE CAUSES ARE MORE COMPLICATED. DISCONTENT AMONG THE AUTO WORKERS  
OVER THE DECLINE OF THEIR RELATIVELY ENVIABLE PURCHASING POWER HAS  
CONTINUED PRACTICALLY EVER SINCE THE SEPTEMBER STRIKE IN THE BUENOS  
AIRES AUTOMOTIVE PLANTS, WHICH OSTENSIBLY ENDED WHEN THE GOVERNMENT  
DECIDED TO TAKE FIRM ACTION AGAINST THE STRIKERS. SOME PLANTS HAVE  
RESPONDED BY DISCHARGING STRIKERS AND IN SOME CASES THOSE DISCHARGED  
HAVE BEEN ARRESTED SUBSEQUENTLY BY THE POLICE. AT THE SAME TIME,  
HOWEVER, MOST PLANTS HAVE CONTINUED TO GRANT NEW WAGE INCREASES TO  
THEIR WORKERS BARELY DISGUISED AS BONUSES OF ONE KIND OR ANOTHER.  
WAGE DEMANDS ARE BUILDING UP IN OTHER SECTORS AND UNION LEADERS ARE  
LOSING SOME OF THEIR EARLIER RETICENCE ON THE ISSUES,  
BUT WE DOUBT THAT THEY WILL BE ABLE TO CARRY OFF A  
GENERAL STRIKE BEFORE THE ADVENT OF THE TRADITIONAL HOLIDAYS AT  
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THE YEAR'S END. WHILE THE GOVERNMENT-PUBLISHED PAY SCALES HAVE

PRODUCED GREAT DISQUIET AMONG THE WORKERS, THEY MAY HAVE BEEN INTENDED IN PART AS A DELAYING TACTIC UNTIL THE GOVERNMENT IS READY TO GRANT GENERAL WAGE INCREASES EARLY NEXT YEAR. OR COURSE, THE NEW REPORTS HERALDING REAL WAGE RELIEF IN JANUARY MAY ALSO BE INTENDED AS A DELAYING TACTIC. THE CONFUSION CREATED BY THE NEW PAY SCALES MAY EVEN BE CONTRIBUTING TO THIS OBJECTIVE. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, THE PORT WORKERS HAVE REALLY BENEFITTED FROM THE NEW PAY SCALES FOR THEIR SECTOR AND WORK ACTIVITIES IN THE BUENOS AIRES PORT ARE NOW DESCRIBED AS HAVING RETURNED TO NORMALITY. END SUMMARY.

2. STRIKES WHICH BEGAN LAST WEEK AT TWO FIAT PLANTS IN THE GREATER BUENOS AIRES AREA AND WHICH HAVE BEEN FOLLOWED BY A SLOW-DOWN AND WORK STOPPAGES AT THE FIAT AND IKA-RENAULT PLANTS IN CORDOBA, ARE BEING DESCRIBED IN THE PRESS AS THE FIRST CONCRETE MANIFESTATIONS OF WORKER DISCONTENT OVER THE NEW WAGE LISTS PUBLISHED BY THE GOVERNMENT FOR THE PRIVATE SECTOR (REFTEL A). FIAT HAS RESPONDED TO THIS NEW OUTBREAK OF LABOR TROUBLE BY DISCHARGING 40 WORKER ACTIVISTS AND SUSPENDING ANOTHER 50 OR 60. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, THE 40 WHO WERE DISCHARGED, INCLUDING SOME UNION SHOP STEWARDS, HAVE BEEN ARRESTED UNDER LAW NO. 21,400 AND PLACED AT THE DISPOSITION OF THE COURTS. AS OF NOVEMBER 30, THE STRIKE ACTION APPEARED TO BE DISSIPATING. FIAT IN CORDOBA REPORTEDLY IS WORKING NORMALLY, THE FIAT PLANTS IN THE BUENOS AIRES AREA HAVE PARTIALLY RETURNED TO WORK AND THE IKA WORKERS REPORTEDLY HAVE VOTED IN AN ASSEMBLY TO ALSO RESUME THEIR WORK ACTIVITIES.

3. ON THE AVERAGE, THE BASE RATES JUST PUBLISHED BY THE GOVERNMENT ARE ABOUT 20 PERCENT BELOW THOSE CURRENTLY BEING PAID BY THE MOTOR VEHICLE INDUSTRY. ALTHOUGH SOME OBSERVERS SAW THE WAGE-SETTING EXERCISE AS THE GOVERNMENT'S WAY OF INCORPORATING AND LEGALIZING THE EXTRALEGAL BONUSES BEING PAID BY INDUSTRY, THE EXERCISE HAS FALLEN SHORT OF REALIZING THAT GOAL -- IF INDEED THAT WAS THE GOAL. ONE OF THE TWO UNDER SECRETARIES OF LABOR, WHO WAS HIGHLY CRITICAL OF THE GOVERNMENT MEASURE AND WHO DID NOT APPEAR TO UNDERSTAND IT VERY WELL EITHER, TOLD LABATT THAT THE COMPUTER WAS PRINTING THE NEW RATES ON THE BASIS OF CURVES DRAWN BY ECONOMISTS ON CHARTS IN THE ECONOMY MINISTER REPRESENTING THE LEVELS WHICH IN THEIR JUDGMENT EACH UNION SHOULD BE RECEIVING. OF COURSE, DECREE NO. 2908 ITSELF INCLUDED A FOOTNOTE TO THE EFFECT THAT THE FIRST PRINTING WAS ONLY CONFIDENTIAL

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AN APPROXIMATION, RECOGNIZING INTRINSICALLY THAT FURTHER REVISIONS WOULD PROVE NECESSARY. THE DECREE ALSO CONTAINED A CAVEAT THAT IN NO CASE WERE DECREASES IN SALARIES INTENDED. THUS, THE OUTCOME OF THIS ISSUE STILL REMAINS IN DOUBT. GOVERNMENT SPOKESMEN HAVE CLARIFIED(?) THAT THE LATEST MEASURE WAS NOT INTENDED AS A WAGE INCREASE (NOTWITHSTANDING NEWS LEAKS IN THE PRESS TO THE CONTRARY WHICH PRECEDED THE MEASURE) AND THAT THEY SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AN "ADJUSTMENT" OF PAY SCALES INSTEAD. NEVERTHELESS, IN SOME CASES, REAL

INCREASES APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN LEGISLATED. AT LEAST "LA NACION" HAS REPORTED THAT THE PORT WORKERS HAVE BENEFITTED BY THE MEASURE AND, ACCORDING TO THAT NEWSPAPER, THE PUBLICATION OF THE PAY SCALES HAS RESULTED IN A COMPLETE NORMALIZATION OF WORK ACTIVITIES IN THE BUENOS AIRES PORT, THE SCENE OF SPORADIC SLOW-DOWNS SINCE EARLY OCTOBER (REFTEL B).

4. WHILE THE FIAT AND IKA LABOR DISPUTES RELATE TO THE WAGE ISSUE, THE INGREDIENTS EVIDENTLY ARE BROADER THAN THE DISQUIET CAUSED BY THE GOVERNMENT'S PUBLICATION OF THE WAGE LISTS. AUTO PLANTS IN THE BUENOS AIRES AREA, IT WILL BE RECALLED, (REFTEL C), EXPERIENCED A SERIES OF WILD-CAT STRIKES IN EARLY SEPTEMBER IN SUPPORT OF DEMANDS FOR WAGE INCREASES ABOVE AND BEYOND THOSE ESTABLISHED BY THE OFFICIAL 12 PERCENT PAY HIKE DECREED EFFECTIVE SEPTEMBER 1. THE STRIKE ACTIVITY LOST ITS MOMENTUM BY THE MIDDLE OF THAT MONTH AND THE LAST WORKERS HOLDING OUT IN THE BARRACAS PLANT OF GENERAL MOTORS RETURNED TO WORK ABOUT A WEEK LATER. A MAJOR FACTOR CONTRIBUTING TO THE LABOR UNREST IN SEPTEMBER WAS THE DEPRESSED STATE OF THE AUTO INDUSTRY. THE RESTORATION OF THE NORMAL 5-DAY WORK WEEK, OWING TO REVIVING MARKET PROSPECTS, UNDOUBTEDLY HELPED TO END THE STRIKE, ALONG WITH THE DISMISSAL OF SOME WORKER ACTIVISTS AND THE PROMULGATION OF LAW NO. 21,400 ESTABLISHING PRISON TERMS FOR STRIKERS AND PROVOCATEURS. HOWEVER, WORKER DISCONTENT HAS BEEN SEETHING JUST BELOW THE SURFACE EVER SINCE, SOME TIMES ERUPTING INTO SPORADIC TROUBLE IN THE INDUSTRY, ALTHOUGH FOR THE MOST PART WITHOUT BEING REPORTED IN THE PRESS. IF THE EARLIER PROBLEM WAS A BY-PRODUCT OF THE RECESSION, THE MORE RECENT DEMANDS ARE FED BY THE NOTION THAT SINCE THE MARKET IS PICKING UP, THE COMPANIES CAN AFFORD TO PAY BETTER WAGES.

5. WE DO NOT HAVE THE PRECISE CHRONOLOGY IN WHICH THESE MORE RECENT PROBLEMS MANIFESTED THEMSELVES. BOTH CHRYSLER AND GENERAL  
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MOTORS EXPERIENCED WORK STOPPAGES IN EARLY NOVEMBER AS A RESULT OF SELECTIVE OR DIFFERENTIAL WAGE INCREASES THINLY VEILED AS JOB RE-CLASSIFICATION SCHEMES, SUCH AS, FOR EXAMPLE, GRANTING GREATER PERCENTAGE INCREASES TO THOSE IN THE HIGHER SKILLS. THESE MEASURES CONSTITUTE FRESH EXAMPLES OF THE MANUFACTURERS' DEALING WITH THE INCREASINGLY CRITICAL DECLINE IN REAL WAGES AND AT THE SAME TIME CIRCUMVENTING THE WAGE LIMITS IMPOSED BY THE GOVERNMENT THROUGH EXTRALEGAL SUBTERFUGES OF ONE KIND OR ANOTHER. CHRYSLER, FOR EXAMPLE, INCREASED ITS COMMUTER ALLOWANCE, SO THAT IT IS NOW 260 PESOS (ONE DOLLAR) PER DAY. FORD EXPERIENCED A WORKER SLOW-DOWN UNTIL IT INCREASED ITS COMMUTER ALLOWANCE AT THE BEGINNING OF NOVEMBER, BUT RETROACTIVE TO SEPTEMBER 1, FROM 420 PESOS TO 7,000 (PRESUMABLY PER MONTH). ON THE OTHER HAND, GENERAL MOTORS, RESPONDED TO ITS TROUBLES BY DISCHARGING NINE WORKER ACTIVISTS ON NOVEMBER 12 AND ANOTHER 12 WORKERS ON NOVEMBER 19. POLICE ARRESTED

THE NINE WORKERS AS COMING UNDER THE PURVIEW OF LAW NO. 21,400.  
ALL THREE COMPANIES -- CHRYSLER, GENERAL MOTORS AND FORD -- ARE  
WORKING NORMALLY AT THE MOMENT.

6. PEUGEOT, WHICH HAD SERIOUS LABOR PROBLEMS IN RECENT WEEKS DURING  
WHICH IT HAD TO CALL IN THE ARMY TO CLEAR OUT SIT-IN STRIKERS, HAS  
SETTLED THE DISPUTE, BUT AT THE COST OF FURTHER INNOCATING CONCES-  
SIONS. THE COMPANY REPORTEDLY HAS AGREED TO A FIVE-POINT  
PLAN WHEREBY IT WILL PAY WORKERS FOR WAGES AND  
ALLOWANCES LOST DURING THE STRIKE;

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-07 INR-07 LAB-04

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R 021130Z DEC 76  
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8074

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BUENOS AIRES 7825

IT WILL FOREGO THE RE-PAYMENT OF A "LOAN" OF 10,000 PESOS (40  
DOLLARS) GIVEN TO ALL ITS WORKERS IN OCTOBER; IT WILL PROVIDE AN  
ADDITIONAL ALLOWANCE OF 10,000 PESOS FOR THE HIGH COST OF MEDICAL  
CARE; AND IT WILL PROVIDE UP TO 2,000 PESOS FOR MEDICINE FOR EACH  
ADDITIONAL FAMILY MEMBER (THERE BEING NO LIMIT SET FOR THE WORKERS  
THEMSELVES).

7. MERCEDES BENZ AND CITROEN ARE DESCRIBED BY A U.S. COMPETITOR AS  
HAVING NO LABOR PROBLEMS AT THE MOMENT AND "WILLING TO DO ANYTHING"  
TO AVOID THEM IN THE FUTURE. MERCEDES, WHICH PAID ITS WORKERS A  
ONE-MONTH BONUS IN AUGUST, IS EXPECTED TO PAY NEW INCREASES EFFECTIVE  
DECEMBER 1 RANGING BETWEEN 10 AND 15 PERCENT. CITROEN, WHICH NOW  
PAYS ITS WORKERS A 5,000 PESO PER MONTH ATTENDANCE BONUS, IS ALSO  
EXPECTED TO PROVIDE NEW INCREASES IN DECEMBER.

8. THE FIAT PLANTS IN BUENOS AIRES ARE ORGANIZED BY THE METALLURGICAL UNION (UOM), WHEREAS THE AUTOMOBILE WORKERS UNION (SMATA) HAS JURISDICTION OVER MOST OF THE REST OF THE AUTOMOBILE MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY. ALTHOUGH BOTH UNIONS HAVE BEEN INTERVENED SINCE THE MARCH "GOLPE" AND UNION ACTIVITIES HAVE BEEN SUSPENDED, INDUSTRY SOURCES COMPLAIN THAT THE MANUFACTURERS ARE BEING WHIPSAWED INTO GRANTING INCREASINGLY GREATER CONCESSIONS TO THEIR WORKERS AT A TIME WHEN THE INDUSTRY IS ONLY BEGINNING TO RECOVER ECONOMICALLY AND THE CONFIDENTIAL

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GOVERNMENT, ON THE OTHER HAND, OFFICIALLY MAINTAINS THAT THEY SHOULD HOLD THE LINE ON WAGES. AT THE SAME TIME, OUR SOURCES SAY, ARMY COMMANDERS OF NEARBY REGIMENTS, ON WHICH THE ULTIMATE SECURITY OF THE AUTO PLANTS DEPENDS, WANT AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE TO AVOID ANY TROUBLE WITH THE WORKERS AND ARE NOT SYMPATHETIC TO THE POLICY OF WAGE CONSTRAINTS. FACED WITH INCREASING PRESSURES FROM THE WORK FORCE FOR NEW WAGE CONCESSIONS AND DISTURBED BY INDUSTRY'S TENDENCY TO GIVE IN TO THESE DEMANDS IN A PIECE-MEAL FASHION--PEUGEOT BEING THE LATEST EXAMPLE--INDUSTRY REPRESENTATIVES ARE MEETING NOW IN AN ATTEMPT TO PUT TOGETHER A COMMON WAGE STRATEGY TO BE HENCEFORTH PRACTICED BY ALL. FIAT HAS DECLINED TO JOIN IN THESE TALKS. A US INDUSTRY SOURCE, POINTING TO THE FACT THAT THE AUTO WORKERS ARE AMONG THE RELATIVELY BEST-PAID IN THE COUNTRY, BELIEVES THAT THE RECENT WAVE OF LABOR TROUBLE IN THE AUTO INDUSTRY IS BEING MANIPULATED BY LEFTIST AGITATORS. WE HAVE NO CONCRETE EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THIS ASSERTION, BUT WE DO BELIEVE THESE STRIKES DEMONSTRATE THAT, DESPITE THE UNION INTERVENTIONS, THE GOVERNMENT'S MEASURES HAVE NOT BROKEN THE WILL OF THE WORKERS OR THEIR ORGANIZATIONS TO OBSTRUCT GOVERNMENT WAGE POLICY. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT WAGE PRESSURES HAVE BEEN BUILDING UP AND THAT UNION LEADERS HAVE FELT INCREASINGLY COMPELLED TO SPEAK OUT ON THE ISSUES. IN TRANSMITTING A NEW REQUEST ON NOVEMBER 23 TO THE LABOR MINISTER FOR AUTHORIZATION TO CONVOKE A "GENERAL PLENARY," REPRESENTATIVES OF THE NON-INTERVENED UNIONS MEETING AT CGT HEADQUARTERS AS AN "INTERGROUP COMMISSION" ISSUED A STRONGLY WORDED COMPLAINT TO THE EFFECT THAT THE WORKERS WERE BEING ASKED TO MAKE SACRIFICES AND TIGHTEN THEIR BELTS WHILE CORPORATE PROFITS WERE ALLEGEDLY "SOARING."

9. WE HEAR MURMURINGS AROUND TOWN THAT UNION LEADERS ARE MEETING BEHIND CLOSED DOORS AND DISCUSSING THE POSSIBILITY OF A GENERAL STRIKE BEFORE THE END OF THE YEAR. OUR JUDGMENT AT THIS POINT IS THAT THIS IS MOSTLY BLUFF AND THAT THE UNION MOVEMENT IS NEITHER PREPARED NOR ABLE TO CARRY OUT AN ACTION OF THIS MAGNITUDE THAT SOON, UNLESS SOME MAJOR NEW DISASTER BEFALLS THE WORKING CLASS--WHICH IS NOT VERY LIKELY, AS THE GOVERNMENT, DESPITE ITS ERRORS AND CONTRADICTIONS, IS OBVIOUSLY ALERT TO THE PROBLEM AND WOULD PROBABLY MOVE TO AVOID CREATING ANYTHING LIKE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR A GENERAL STRIKE.

HOWEVER, WE FULLY EXPECT SECTORAL STRIKES TO CONTINUE. THE RECORD OF THE PAST FEW MONTHS WILL SHOW THAT NO SOONER HAD ONE STRIKE ENDED THAN A NEW STRIKE BEGAN IN ANOTHER SECTOR. CURIOUSLY, ALL  
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OF THE STRIKES HAVE BEEN BY WORKERS FROM UNIONS WHOSE LEADERSHIP HAS BEEN INTERVENED BY THE GOVERNMENT--AUTOMOBILE WORKERS, LIGHT AND POWER WORKERS, BANK WORKERS, PORT WORKERS, AND NOW AUTOMOBILE WORKERS AGAIN. INDEED, THERE IS LITTLE WONDER THAT SOME OBSERVERS SUSPECT THESE LABOR CONFLICTS ARE BEING ORCHESTRATED BY SOMEONE. WE REMAIN PUZZLED BY ECONOMY MINISTER MARTINEZ DE HOZ' EXERCISE IN ESTABLISHING WAGE SCALES WHICH, BY ALLOWING THE EXPECTATION TO TAKE HOLD BEFOREHAND THAT THE MEASURE WAS INTENDED TO PROVIDE SOME WAGE RELIEF, HAS PRODUCED DISILLUSIONMENT INSTEAD AND ADDED FUEL TO THE FLAMES. AS THE UNDERSECRETARY OF LABOR PUT IT, INSTEAD OF HELPING MATTERS, THE INTRODUCTION OF THE NEW PAY SCALES HAS RESULTED IN "90 PERCENT OF THE WORK FORCE" (HIS ESTIMATE) CURSING THE GOVERNMENT. IF THE REVISED WAGE SCHEDULES CONTINUE TO BE PUBLISHED IN THE OFFICIAL BULLETIN AT THE RATE OF 11 UNION SECTORS PER DAY, ALMOST ANOTHER 50 DAYS WILL BE REQUIRED BEFORE THE LAST OF THE 530 COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AGREEMENTS OF JULY, 1975 HAS BEEN MODIFIED. DURING THIS INTERLUDE, OF COURSE, THE COST OF LIVING WILL CONTINUE TO RISE. NEVERTHELESS, TO SOME EXTENT, THE MEASURE MAY BE CONSIDERED A DELAYING TACTIC UNTIL THE GOVERNMENT IS PREPARED TO GRANT GENUINE RELIEF FOR THE PURCHASING POWER PROBLEM. ALREADY, NEW STATEMENTS ATTRIBUTED TO THE GOVERNMENT HAVE APPEARED PRESAGING A GENERAL WAGE INCREASE AT THE BEGINNING OF NEXT YEAR, AND THIS, IF LITTLE ELSE, SHOULD HELP TO DILUTE THE THREAT OF A GENERAL STRIKE IN DECEMBER.  
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## Message Attributes

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